

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ATHENS 02281 241308Z

44

ACTION EUR-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8004

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 2281

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR GR TU

SUBJECT: GREEK PROTESTS ABOUT ALLEGED TURKISH PRO-
VOCATIONS IN THRACE AND THE AEGEAN

REF: ATHENS 2270

1. OVER THE WEEKEND I SPOKE TO BOTH FOREIGN MINISTER
BITSIOS AND DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROFF AND GOT SOME FURTHER
DETAILS ON THE ALLEGED TURKISH PROVOCATIONS IN THRACE
AND THE AEGEAN, AND GOG RESPONSES THERETO. (THESE
INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED IN REFTEL AND IN GREATER DETAIL
IN SEVERAL DEFATT MESSAGES.)

2. THE FIRST INCIDENT APPARENTLY OCCURRED IN THE AREA
OF THE EVROS RIVER IN THRACE LAST WEDNESDAY MORNING WHEN,
ACCORDING TO BITSIOS AND AVEROFF, THE TURKS FIRED ON A
GREEK AIRCRAFT FLYING ON THE GREEK SIDE OF THE EVROS
RIVER BOUNDARY. (I UNDERSTAND THE TURKS MAINTAIN IT WAS OVER THEIR
TERRITORY.) THEN ON THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 20,
A TURKISH RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT MADE AN UNAUTHORIZED
FLIGHT OVER THE ISLAND OF KHIOS. AVEROFF DISCUSSED
THE MATTER WITH BITSIOS AND, APPARENTLY, THE TWO OF THEM,
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PAGE 02 ATHENS 02281 241308Z

WITH PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS DECIDED TO MAKE

A "FIRM" RESPONSE TO TURKEY. THEY INSTRUCTED THEIR AMBASSADOR IN ANKARA TO VISIT THE TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTRY AND MAKE A STRONG "ORAL" PROTEST.

3. THEN THURSDAY AFTERNOON THERE WERE ADDITIONAL UNAUTHORIZED FLIGHTS OVER THE ISLAND OF KHIOS BY TURKISH AIRCRAFT. AVEROFF TOLD ME THAT FROM TWO TO FOUR TURKISH AIRCRAFT CROSSED THE ISLAND FOUR TIMES, TWICE FROM NORTH TO SOUTH AND TWICE FROM EAST TO WEST, APPARENTLY TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS. HE SAID THEY WERE TRAVELING AT A VERY LOW ALTITUDE. IN ADDITION, AVEROFF SAID, A TURKISH RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT FLEW OVER THE ISLANDS OF SAMOS AND MITTILINI (LESVOS), ALSO TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS. AVEROFF SAID HE HAD TALKED TO BITSIOS AGAIN AND WANTED THE TURKISH GOVT INFORMED IMMEDIATELY IN WRITING THAT THE NEXT TURKISH AIRCRAFT THAT FLEW OVER A GREEK ISLAND WOULD BE "SHOT DOWN."

4. BITSIOS CONFIRMED THAT AVEROFF WANTED TO DO THIS, EXPRESSING THE VIEW THAT A SOFT OR CONCILIATORY RESPONSE BY THE GOG WOULD BE TAKEN BY TURKEY AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. BITSIOS SAID THAT AFTER FULLER CONSIDERATION WITHIN THE GOG, IT WAS DECIDED TO MAKE A SECOND AND STRONGER ORAL PROTEST IN ANKARA AND TO PROVIDE IN WRITING ONLY A MEMORANDUM SUMMARIZING THE DETAILS ABOUT THE UNAUTHORIZED OVERFLIGHTS. THE ORAL PROTEST, ACCORDING TO BITSIOS, INSTEAD OF CONTAINING THE WARNING ABOUT SHOOTING DOWN THE TURKISH PLANES, WARNED TURKEY THAT IN THE EVENT OF ANY FURTHER UNAUTHORIZED OVERFLIGHTS GREECE INTENDED "TO TAKE ALL MEASURES ALLOWED UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW." BITSIOS SAID THAT IT WAS UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE GOG THAT THIS MIGHT INCLUDE FIRING ON THE TURKISH AIRCRAFT.

5. IN MY CONVERSATIONS WITH BITSIOS AND AVEROFF, I STRONGLY COUNSELED AGAINST FIRING ON ANY TURKISH AIRCRAFT AND POINTED OUT THE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES OF ANY SUCH ACTION. BOTH ACKNOWLEDGED THE DANGER BUT SAID THAT GREECE WOULD HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE IF THE TURKS PERSISTED IN SUCH MISSIONS.

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PAGE 03 ATHENS 02281 241308Z

6. LATER, ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, BITSIOS TOLD ME THAT THE TURKISH GOVT HAD INFORMED THE GREEK AMBASSADOR IN ANKARA THAT THEIR "AEGEAN EXERCISE" HAD BEEN CONCLUDED. BITSIOS ALSO INDICATED THAT THE GOG EXPECTED SOME FURTHER WORD FROM ANKARA ON THESE INCIDENTS.
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